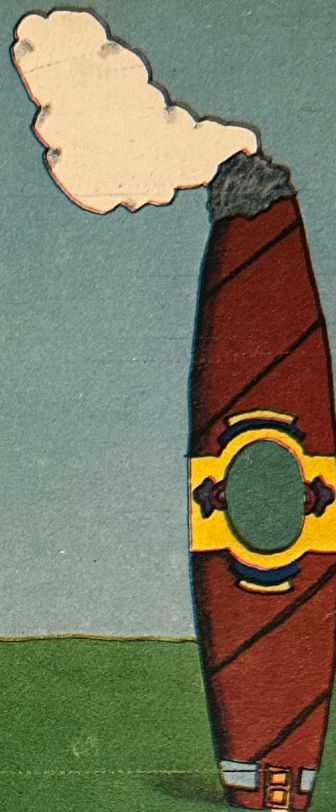


LOS ANGELES TIMES NOVEMBER 30, 1969

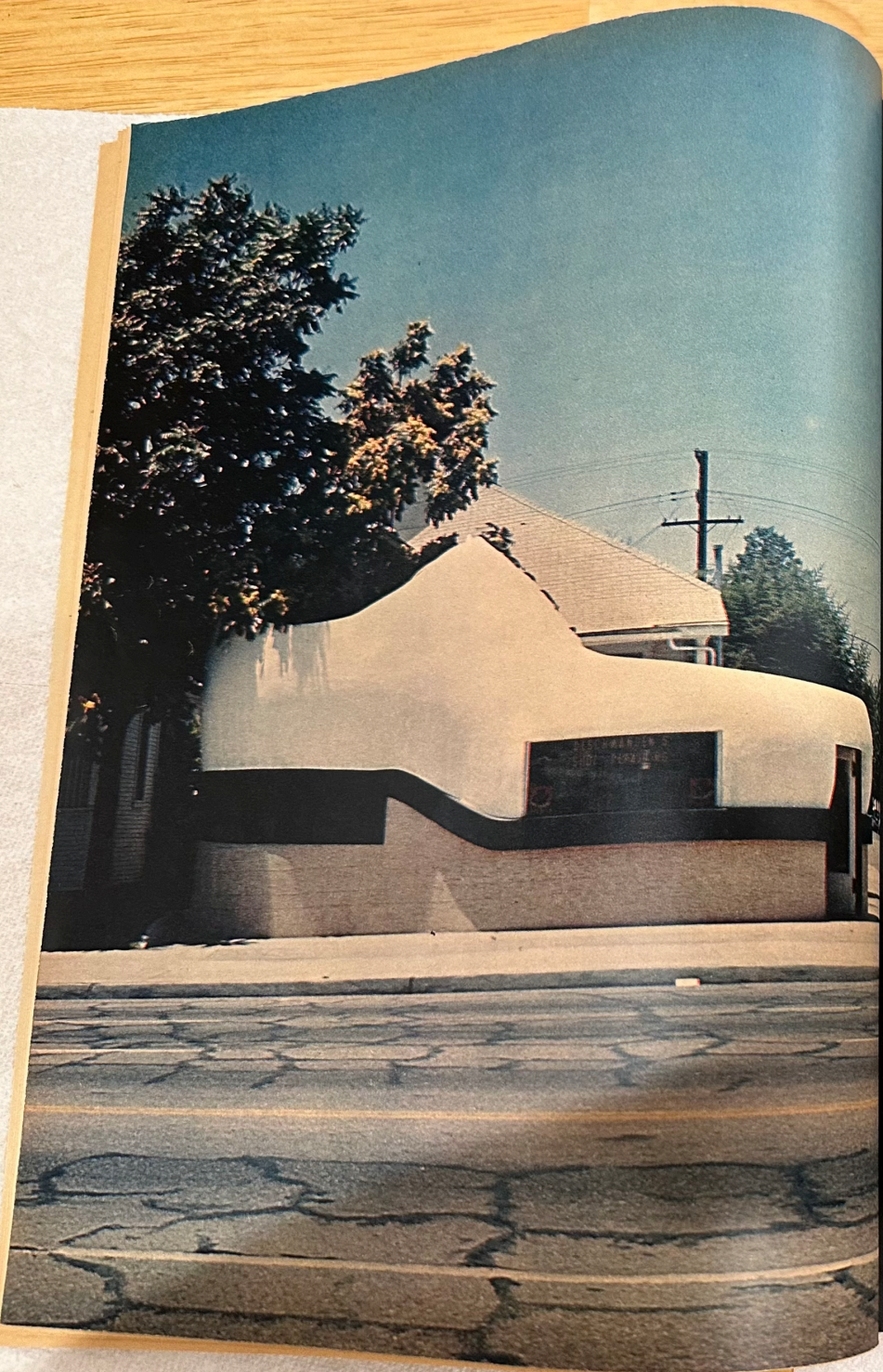
# West



Cheney

Southern California: the undisputed center of the world for hard sell architecture





"You know what I saw the first day I got to Los Angeles . . . ? We were driving back from the airport, and we passed a doughnut stand, and on top of it was this huge cement doughnut about twenty feet high . . . revolving. That was the first thing I saw, before I saw the stand. From a long, long way off, that big empty hole going around and around up in the air, with some name painted on it. Well, I thought, that's what this city is. That's what it is, great big advertisement for nothing!"

—THE NOWHERE CITY

Perfect! The character in Alison Lurie's novel who speaks these lines is *ab-so-lutely* the quintessential Eastern prig. But anyone who grew up in the East and was brought up to regard Art! as being the highest achievement of humanity has to have felt a twinge of the sensibilities when first visiting Los Ange-

les. (It is probably significant in fact, that the one bit of artistic license in that passage from *Nowhere City* lies in the fact that the real giant do-nut, on Sepulveda, doesn't rotate; but Miss Lurie's vision of it is correct — it should.)

In the East, after all, Commerce—which funds most of our urban environment—is on the corporate level downtown, and therefore pays lip service to Art. In L.A., with a thousand downtowns, it's traditionally been a matter of retailing: Buy Here! Sav-Mor! Kwik Klean!

Furthermore, the Eastern perspective is to take the relationship of Commerce to Art very seriously—not only are the very wealthy the patrons of Art, but they are also expected to bring their regard into architecture.

By LAWRENCE DIETZ

But then someone comes out to L.A. and Gaud! there's a damn stucco hot dog, twenty feet long. There is no way to defend such a creation as Art Art; it can be described as Pop Art, or Camp, but what it really is, is the ultimate commercial, a terrific point-of-purchase display, obviously constructed by someone with a sense of humor.

A fellow named Wilson Mizner was talking about ritzy restaurants with a friend, Herbert Somborn, in 1926. Somborn advanced the notion that all of the plush trimmings were unnecessary. "If you give people good food and good service, they'd eat anywhere—even in a hat." Mizner was so struck by this assertion that he formed a company with Somborn, and together

they opened the Brown Derby.

Today, of course, two budding restaurateurs would find themselves a celebrity to front for a chain of franchise eateries, then parcel the design for the units to an architect who would dutifully trot out something crisp, clean, efficient and eye-catching. The eye-catching part of it would be in the sign and the colors, all very scientific you understand, yellow and red for that hot taco look, but without the least comprehension of the sad fact that such a building must exist with neighbors that have been designed on the same principle. When the eye sees a cluster of ten startling signs! what does it transmit to the brain? Anyone who has arrived in El Paso after a long day of driving and

## There Was an Old Woman Who Worked in a Shoe



BROWN DERBY



ORANGE



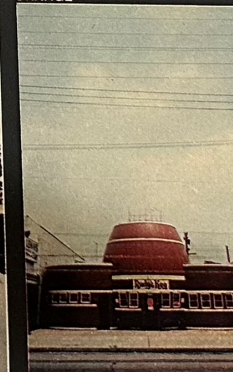
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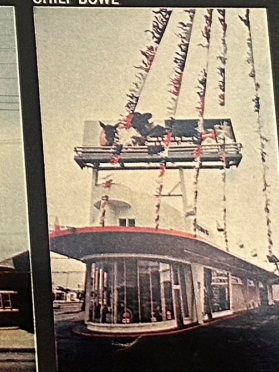
ICEBERG



TEEPEE



KEG



BOAT

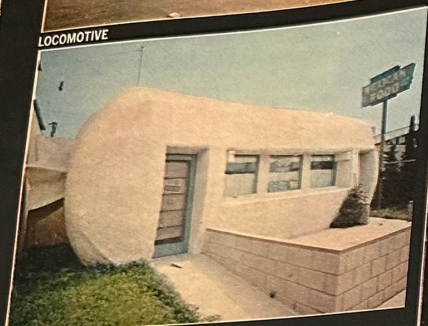


PIANO





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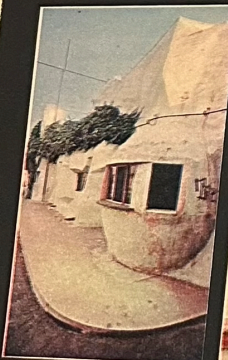
then headed north on 54 to Fort Bliss—five solid miles of unrelenting neon—might wonder about the validity of the basic assumption in evidence there, that electricity can induce an unending visual orgasm.

Which is not to argue that all buildings should eschew neon and simply be designed so as to mirror the services

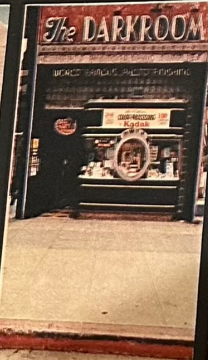
provided by the occupant: the imagination doesn't just boggle; it retches. But if there is any possibility for humor in the distribution of goods, why not here? Unfortunately, most of the examples of Super-Realistic architecture—hats, oranges, ships, pickle barrels, pianos—were produced in the '20s and '30s, when the Mizners and Somborns had



MILK BOTTLE



MOUNTAIN



CAMERA



FRUIT BASKET



HOT DOG



hearts that were young and gay.

Today the giant corporations deal with architectural concepts based on maximum-yield-per-area-per-zoning law, with perhaps a bit of sculpture thrown in.

It is nearly impossible to get a management type to admit the possibility of the heretical notion that if one isn't going to ignore economics (which dictate the mediocre) and take the chance of underwriting real Art, one might as well have some fun. Last year I was down in Atlanta, doing a story on Coca-Cola advertising. The first day I was there I had lunch with some Coke executives, one of whom mentioned that the company was building a new headquarters in the city.

Flushed by a couple of drinks taken before what was my breakfast, I thought that the building was in the planning stage, so I launched into a passionate argument for a building shaped like, that's right! a gigantic Coca-Cola bottle, green glass and twenty stories high! Like any cunning drunk, I was being very careful to be businesslike: "It's not impractical, you understand. For example, all the air conditioning equipment could be in the metal bottle cap." Then I looked around and saw them staring at me as if I were suggesting that we all strip down to our BVDs and march on the State Capitol.

Some corporation could still do it, of course, and I nominate Park Avenue in New York as a location. Land prices would have to drop for it to be feasible (today, were you to sit down on the sidewalk at 52nd and Park, the space you occupied would probably be worth enough to support you for a year), but the best part of having such a building there would be its tonic effect on all the corporate and cultural hotshots who take themselves so seriously (where is the fun in Fun City?).

I've got it! A 35-story Alka-Seltzer bottle in beautiful dark blue glass! Perfect! ↻



DOG